

**A TRUE
STATE OF THE CASE ;
OR,
A VINDICATION OF THE ORTHODOX
DISSENTERS,
FROM THE MISREPRESENTATIONS,
OF
THE REV. ROBERT FOLEY, M. A.
OF ORIEL COLLEGE OXFORD, AND RECTOR OF OLDSWINFORD,
WORCESTERSHIRE :
CONTAINED IN A LATE PUBLICATION OF HIS,
ENTITLED
A DEFENCE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND ;
IN
FIVE LETTERS,**

ADDRESSED TO HIM,
 WHEREIN THE IMPORTANT SUBJECTS OF SCHISM, THE DIVINITY OF
 CHRIST, AND OBEDIENCE TO CIVIL GOVERNMENT ; ARE
 CONSIDERED.

BY THOMAS BEST, ✓
 MINISTER OF THE CHAPEL AT CRADLEY, NEAR STOURBRIDGE.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy Neighbour."
 MOSES.
 "Speaking the truth in love." PAUL.

.....
 Stourbridge,

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LETTER

THE FIRST.

REV. SIR,

WHEN I reflect upon your acquirements as a scholar, your knowledge as a divine, and your experience as a person considerably advanced in life; I cannot doubt of your ability to separate ideas, and to distinguish between things that differ.

A small acquaintance with the ill consequences resulting from the ambiguity of language, will fully shew, that, in addressing each other, we should

labour to be as clear and explicit as possible in the expressions we use; and if ever this rule requires more than ordinary attention, it should be employed in the business of *Accusation*: Least we should widely differ from that glorious and equitable BEING, who never would have the righteous to suffer with the guilty; and also, lest we should too nearly resemble him, who on account of his indiscriminate and foul aspersions, is called the accuser of the brethren.

You, Sir, in the course of your christian ministrations, have thought proper to attempt a *Defence* of the Church of England; and in so doing, you have judged it expedient to employ the weapon of Accusation: My design in these Letters is not to wrest this instrument of defence out of your hands, but if possible to avert the blow from those, who, as I believe they never justly offended you, nor upon the whole have had “Evil will at *your* “*Zion*,*” ought not to feel its weight, much less to welter in the blood intended to be spilt by your skilful and powerful thrusts.

It is with much concern I observe, in your late publication, that your Accusations are not confined to your own Parish,—No: They extend to the Neighbourhood.—They extend to a very considerable, and a very respectable part of the British Nation. For you artfully heap together many evil things which are peculiar to Anabaptists, Quakers, Presbyterians, Unitarians, Priestleyans, Fifth monarchy men, Republicans and Levellers, Ferocious and blood-thirsty Frenchmen, and Persons, who, to use your own language, have “Approached the very verge of Treason,” Page 8; and all this is done to shew the expediency, and propriety of your defending the Church of England, against the *Sectaries* and *Dissenters*.

Were a person who does not approve of the Episcopal form of Church Government, nor sees the propriety of an Ecclesiastical Establishment, to collect all the absurd, superstitious, and cruel things, that could be said of the conduct of persons who have approved of an alliance between Church and State; and then to make these things apply to

the Churchmen now in existence, in opposition to the Dissenters ; I believe there are those living who would charge such a character with something worse than misrepresentation.

That you, Sir, have misrepresented the Sectaries, as you are pleased to call them, and have said many things of the Dissenters, which will not apply to them as a body, it is one design of these Letters to prove: And when I say, I cannot believe a person of your moral character would intentionally charge innocent persons with such criminal things ; I am obliged to believe the accusations in question are owing to the want of information.

Busily employed in discharging the Parochial duties of a large and very populous Parish, and frequently secluding yourself from the hurries of active life, to enjoy the sweets of learned reflection ; you have not had an *opportunity* of taking an accurate view of the present state of the religious world. Hence your mistake ; to rectify which, and

and so prevent the injurious consequences, is the *principal* design of the following sheets: and though, Sir, I am much inferior to you as to family connections, the advantages of education, situation in life, and the veneration due to advanced age; yet, I hope, the above candid remarks will afford a sufficient apology for addressing you again upon this important subject. In the mean while,

I am,

REV. SIR,

Yours &c.

LETTER

THE SECOND.

REV. SIR,

IN my last, it was with reluctance I felt myself obliged to say, that you had, in your late Publication, entitled "*A Defence of the Church of England, &c.*" used the weapon of Accusation; and had unhappily misrepresented the Dissenters as a Body. I now proceed to offer some general proof of this assertion.

When I first read your Publication, I could not help recollecting a grammatical distinction, which I am

I am fully persuaded you are well acquainted with. You know, Sir, nouns substantive, or the names of those things which exist, *may* be used to describe that which comprehends the Genus, without distinguishing the Species; and that, therefore, *such* words are called Generic Terms. You well know too, that nouns substantive *may* be used to describe Species, or a particular sort; and that then, the word is a subdivision of the General Term: but that it would be highly improper to use them *synonymously*. Take an illustration.

I believe about the time of the glorious Revolution, a memorable difference of sentiment obtained among the members, and especially the ministers of the Church of England; respecting the lawfulness or unlawfulness of taking the oath of allegiance to the then illustrious reigning Prince and Princess, King William and Queen Mary: those who refused this Oath were called, if I mistake not, Nonjurors, while those who took it were called Jurors.

Now, Sir, if a person who was in principle a Juror, had written a treatise against the sentiments and practices of the Nonjurors, and, when he had detailed and placed in the blackest point of view the real or supposed crimes of this party, he had often *artfully* foisted in the Generic Term **CHURCH**, instead of the specific one Nonjuror, and thus had given occasion to the world to say, the members of the Church of England were disaffected to the then existing Government, by affixing crimes to the *whole body* which could be predicated of only a few, and those of the nonjuring party ; should not you as a Person “ BORN, “ BRED, and BENEFICED in the Church of England”, have felt your mind moved with indignation at such an improper, and I may add, *Dishonest* use of Terms?

You well know the Terms Separatist, and Dissenter, are General, compared with the Terms Unitarian, Presbyterian, &c.— Now, Sir, let us see how you have used these Terms.

In

In your first Sermon you begin your attack, by telling the world that not the Unitarians, nor the Priestleians, but the *Dissenters* in your Neighbourhood, have been making "invidious cavils, and groundless objections at your " Zion." Page 3.

They are restless, you further add, in their endeavour to put men out of conceit with its doctrines and services, and I must add, say you, to turn them aside from the Truth, as it is in Jesus, Page 4.—Again, you represent them as making serious attacks on your faith and doctrine, and petulant cavils at your services and ceremonies, Page 4.—As proceeding sometimes by open assault, and sometimes covertly by sap; one while overleaping the fold, another while prowling about in a borrowed skin, or sheep's clothing, Page 6.—As insinuating privately to individuals, and as publishing openly to the world, their objections to the establishment, Page 7.—As adversaries levelling their envenomed shafts

shafts principally at the Athanasian creed, Page 69. As charging the established Church with bigotry, absurdity, and what is still worse, with the most antichristian uncharitableness. Upon which you further remark, A serious and cruel charge this at any rate ; and if false and groundless, such as I hope and trust I shall prove it to be, words cannot adequately express it's unparallel'd malignity and impudence, Page 70.

You charge them, in the same page, with indecency, arrogance, and ingratitude : And farther, with slandering and reviling the established Church, and national worship.— You accuse them as virulent adversaries, Page 80 ; and in Page 82, as insidious Sectaries, representing the Church of England in an odious light. As guilty of the heinous sin of Schism, Page 96.— As having squeamish consciences, Page 102.— As Persons capable of fly and insidious insinuations, Page 108.— As insidiously and indecently commenting upon your form of ordination, Page 113.— As employing equivocal ambiguity, frequently, and

shame-

shamelessly, Page 116.—As using frivolous and captious exceptions, as gainsayers, Page 118.—As capable of hypocritical affectation of sanctity, Page 131.—As lying under the heavy charge of unnecessary and therefore sinful, Schism, Page 132. You say too, Page 134, you well know the rooted obstinacy of their prejudices. You insinuate, Page 135, that they use wily arts to seduce your People from the plain and safe road of Truth, into the crooked bye-paths of error, which lead to destruction, and as ceasing not for that purpose continually to revile and malign the established Church.

There is another charge and misrepresentation, which I could not for some time believe, though both my eyes made the incessant report ; it is this, you positively declare, Page 11, The Dissenters of this day almost universally reject, the Divinity of Christ. And in Page 83 you aver, They will not allow Jesus to be more than Man, and as such, the obscure and illiterate son of an honest Carpenter.

And notwithstanding it has been a time when persons suspected of disloyalty to Government were exposed to imminent danger, (for when you preached these Discourses, that important security to British Liberty, the Habeas Corpus act was suspended,) yet you felt no scruple roundly to affirm of the Dissenters, that They are peevish petulant cavillers, discontented men, impatient of controul, restless under authority, and dissatisfied with whatever accords not minutely with their own idle fancies, opinions and prejudices, Page 131.

These things, Sir, (I repeat the fact,) you do not assert of Unitarians, or Priestleians in particular, had you done so, I should have left those Gentlemen to have defended themselves. And I cannot but observe, as you began, so you proceed, to employ these General Terms respecting Dissenters as a Body, using them all along without any proper discrimination. For thus you begin your last Sermon, (Page 123.) Having in my last Discourse obviated the cavils raised by the Dissenters, &c. you

you thus proceed to speak of them, when treating upon the expediency of a review of the liturgy of the established Church ; And such might not improbably have taken place before now, had it not been for the unreasonable cavils of the Dissenters ; whose real aims are easily discoverable through the flimsy veil wherewith they affect to cover them. Against these both Church and State can never be too cautiously guarded, Page 134.

But, Sir, as it is a notorious fact, that there are thousands of Dissenters in this kingdom, whose faith is as orthodox as yours ; and who exult in the British Constitution as settled at the glorious Revolution ; and who, from religious principle, are both peaceable and loyal : I think it is very evident by using General Terms in the above heavy accusations, you have grossly misrepresented a very large body of persons in general, and myself and congregation in particular : At the instance of many respectable members of which, I address these Letters to you.

But

But as I hinted in my first Letter, I judged your misrepresentation was the effect of a want of information, respecting the now existing circumstances in the Religious world, I shall not impute it to a worse motive ; and therefore respectfully take my leave at present, by saying, to remove odium from the innocent, and prevent further mistake, I shall yet take the Liberty of laying before you what I sincerely believe to be the views of *by far the greater part* of that respectable body of British Subjects, the Dissenters, with respect to Schism,—the Divinity of Christ,—and obedience to Civil Government.

I am,

REV. SIR,

Yours &c.

LETTER

LETTER

THE THIRD.

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REV. SIR,

IN my last, I was under the painful necessity of adducing from your late publication, an accumulated mass of accusations levelled indiscriminately at the Dissenters as a body, and I might here take notice of the strong, and, I am sorry to say, inflammatory language there made use of; but while I esteem it an incumbent duty to vindicate myself and brethren from unmerited aspersions, I shall spread the mantle of christian charity over the asperity of stile which Mr. FOLEY has adopted.

Among

Among the many specific charges you have thought proper to institute against the Dissenters as a body, this is one, that they are Schismatics. Thus you express yourself, Page 96, where speaking of the weakness of the arguments Dissenters allege for their separation from the Establishment, All of them (i. e. the Reasons they adduce,) are far from sufficient to justify what I make no scruple of calling the heinous sin of Schism. And again, in Page 131, and 132, after having represented the Dissenters as peevish and petulant, as discontented men, impatient of controul, restless under authority, &c. you proceed to say: But were their Objections of ten times more importance than they in fact possess, still would they be far from sufficient to vindicate them from the heavy charge of unnecessary, and therefore sinful, Schism.

It is to the subject of *Schism* I mean to apply myself in this Letter, by calmly enquiring into its nature, and attempting to ascertain the degree of Schismatical guilt, which attaches to Dissenters considered as a Body.

Indeed

Indeed, Sir, I feel a sort of conviction in my own mind, that you yourself in the very publication now in question, have at least mitigated the *crime* alleged to those who have actually dissent from the established Church, if not emancipated them from the *criminal charge* altogether: for near the close of your last Sermon, you thus express yourself; I am not sanguine enough to entertain a hope that any thing I have advanced in these Discourses, would reconcile a single Dissenter to the Church, I well know the rooted obstinacy of their prejudices imbibed in earliest *infancy*.

Now to allude to the Figure made use of in the Text you have chosen,* may I not here ask, if these Dissenters, even in their earliest infancy, were in the habit of imbibing prejudice against the establishment, and by consequence never belonged to your *Glorious Church*, whose ornament is, you say, as a Wedding Garment without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; how comes it to pass, that they can be under the

* Mr. FOLEY's Text is, *Ephesians v. and part of Verse 27.* "A Glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

heavy charge of separating or rending from it? But I must proceed with caution; for I think I hear Mr. FOLEY say, but a great number of the Dissenters have left the Church when adult, and are not they chargeable with Schism?

I freely grant the fact here expressed, and will just hint at some of the Reasons which may help us to account for it. Within a few years back, pious young men of popular gifts have, for the *heinous crimes* of singing psalms, praying extempore, and exhorting, been expelled from the University,--and other serious young men of parts, who have not had it in their power to obtain an University education, (the expence of which I believe you well know,) have with a degree of classical learning applied for orders, but the Bishops, for reasons best known to themselves, have refused to ordain them.

These persons, and others of the same views, judging they were called of God to preach the Gospel, have not been without Patrons, even among the learned and the noble; under such influence, they have been directed, I hope, by the good Providence of God, to

popu-

populous Cities and Towns, where the places of worship were not nearly adequate to accommodate the inhabitants; here they have preached, perhaps at first in the open air, in imitation of Him who did not disdain to make a mountain His pulpit, nor the heavens His sounding board,—the people heard,—were benefited, and associated together,—a place of worship was erected, and the minister settled to the edification of many, and the increase of vital Religion.

The same has been the case in many large Parishes in the Country, and their populous Villages.

Thus, Sir, I admit the Fact, that many Persons separate from the Church of England, when they are adult; but then, in my humble opinion, they are not chargeable with guilt, morally speaking. Indeed, if an Ecclesiastic explains the word Schism, he applies it to all that have separated from the Church he belongs to; and taking it for granted national Churches *as such* are Christian

Churches in any particular Kingdom to which they belong, by necessary consequence he supposes the persons who have departed from such a Church, to lie under the charge of this *very heavy crime*.

But surely our Civilians will not talk in this manner; for if a man may not separate from an established Church, without incurring *moral guilt*, then is the Toleration Act, if not the minister at least the countenancer of sin.

But this cannot be, for we can never suppose so venerable and so wise a Legislative Body as the Commons, Lords, and King of England, would have exposed themselves to the vengeance of Heaven, by an act of legislation which immediately leads to iniquity, and countenances the practice of it. But say, am I mistaken when I affirm, that the *free exercise* of religion in Great Britain, by all who could give security for their good behaviour to the civil authority, was a part of the national compact entered into by the representatives

tives

tives of the people with William the third of glorious memory?

But we will appeal to an higher authority than ecclesiastics, or civilians: And that is the Sacred Scripture. The greek word, ΣΧΙΣΜΑ, signifies, according to the learned PARKHURST, in general, a being divided, and in particular, a *rent* as in a garment; it is thus used in Matthew ix, 16: and a *division* in mind or sentiment, a *dissention* of opinion, as in John vii, 43. In the latter sense this *formidable* word is harmless enough in its import, for surely persons may be of different opinions without contracting guilt, for simply being of another judgement:—And if we take the word as signifying a separation or rent, even then it is not always of criminal import, for you well know, Sir, separation from a religious body, simply considered, as such, cannot be sin, for if so, verily the Church of England is guilty in this matter.—The circumstances that attend this separation make it so; and if it can be proved that the word Church is never used in the new Testament to signify a

national Church, nor Persons vested with ecclesiastical power, but a congregation of persons believing in our Lord Jesus Christ, and united according to the order of the Gospel, it will then plainly appear, I hope, that in the sight of God, a man is at liberty to join that Christian society which in his apprehension most resembles the apostolic constitution. This Task I now impose upon myself, and when I have executed it, shall respectfully take my leave for the present.

You say, Sir, Page 9, the word Church has three different appropriate senses. In its most ordinary and simple meaning it denotes the Edifices wherein we meet together for the purposes of public prayer &c; and where we are now assembled. Secondly, it denotes the members of Christ, or the aggregate body of Christian people. And Thirdly, it is used to signify a particular Christian community who agree together in the same doctrine and discipline, and the use of the same rites and ceremonies, in which sense we speak of the Greek Church, the Church of Rome, and the Church of England.

I do

I do not know by what standard you determine the acceptation of words which relate to Church establishments: I am free to confess, that when treating upon religious subjects, I advert to Scripture to know in what sense the Holy Spirit most commonly uses any word, and judge of it accordingly. Now, Sir, though I perfectly agree with you in part of your third explanation of the word Church, yet I do declare I never saw the word *κοινωνία* which we render Church, used in the new Testament to signify a *national* Church of any sort; it is used to signify the Body of the faithful, as in 1 Col. i. 18. It is also used Acts xix. 39. for a civil assembly delegated by due authority, but never for an ecclesiastical delegation, or for persons having power with respect to religious matters, in which sense I take it for granted the word is used in the 20th Article of your Church, but by what scripture authority, I confess I know not. The word we render Church, is used in an instance or two, but perhaps clearly in one only, to signify the place where a religious congregation may meet together, as in 1 Cor. xi, 22. though, Sir, you say in its

most ordinary and simple meaning it denotes such an edifice as that in which you preached your Sermons. In the lips of the vulgar it may, being sometimes put into their mouths, for, I fear, no very *christian* purposes, but in the mouth of a sacred classic it ought not *so* to be used.

The word, *ekklesia*, which we render Church is most frequently used in a limited signification as denoting a particular congregation of christians, as 1 Cor. i, 2. But the places are so numerous where the word is to be found in this sense, that it would be almost endless to cite all the passages: hence we read of the Church at Jerusalem, the Church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla, and and also in the house of Philemon, but no where, as my recollection serves, of a national Church in the new Testament. My Kingdom is not of this world, says Christ, John xviii, 36. From these premises one inference may be drawn, namely, that in those sacred societies who believe in Christ, and are united according to the order of the Gospel, there is no exclusive authority, there is no superiority;

ty;

ty ; all are therefore upon a level, and consequently, when an individual, or a body of persons, breaks off from one, to form or to enlarge another christian society, there is, there can be no Schism.

And here I am very happy to say my ideas exactly correspond with those of the late learned and celebrated **LOCKE**, and therefore you will excuse a quotation from his works---“ Let us now consider, says this respectable author, what a Church is, a Church then I take to be a voluntary society of men joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshiping of God, in such manner as they judge acceptable to him, and effectual to the salvation of their Souls.——

“ I say it is a free and Voluntary Society. No body is born a member of any Church ; otherwise the Religion of Parents would descend unto the Children, by the same right of Inheritance as their Temporal Estates, and every one would hold his Faith by the same Tenure he does his Lands ; than which, nothing can be imagined more absurd.

Thus

Thus therefore that matter stands. No man by nature is bound unto any particular Church or sect, but every one joins himself Voluntarily to that Society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God.—The hopes of Salvation, as it was the only Cause of his entrance into that Communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there;—for if afterwards he discover any thing either erroneous in the Doctrine, or incongruous in the worship of that Society to which he has joined himself, why should it not be as free for him to go out as to enter? No member of a religious Society can be tied with any other Bands but what proceed from the certain Expectation of Eternal Life.—A Church then is a Society of members Voluntarily uniting to this end.*”

Indeed, Sir, it appears to me, that if we would look for Schism in the sense a person of

* Locke's Works, Folio Edition Vol. 2. Page 236.

the establishment uses the term, we should not look to those who have been educated without its pale, or have left its connection and formed others, but we should look for it among those who professedly, within its boundaries, are varying from its essence and constitution, and however *glorious* and *spotless* the garment, are making rends *in* it: and when I read the articles, liturgy, and homilies of the Church of England, and then consider the contents of many modern discourses that have been delivered within the established walls, and published for the instruction of its members; I am free to declare, in my opinion there is too great a variation from the doctrines of the establishment, to say with safety, that all her sons, though they daily eat *her* bread, are free from Schism.

I am, &c.

REV. SIR,

Your's, &c.

LETTER

LETTER

THE FOURTH.

REV. SIR,

IT hath ever appeared to me that religion in the extensive sense of the word, may be considered as compounded of parts which may be called essential, and of those things which may be deemed circumstantial only. Among the latter, according to my view, are to be classed Habits, Forms, Rites, Ceremonies, and Modes of Church government: And among the former its peculiar and characteristic *doctrines*. Of this number is the doctrine of Christ's Divinity. It lies at the very foundation of faith, hope and love. It constitutes the corner

stone

stone of the fair edifice of Christianity. And, to express myself in the words of a late elegant Writer, which he used upon another occasion, "And as " this foundation is either solidly or superficially " laid, the whole building rises more firm and " graceful, or being badly founded, threatens an " opprobrious fall.

Uninformed of the real state of the religious world, you have roundly affirmed that the Dissenters do not believe *this Doctrine*; but that they deny, and deny in a very offensive manner too, the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

By a Dissenter I understand one who, for whatever reason, does not profess to communicate with the Church of England, but chuses to withdraw from that class of Christians; and of such there are to be found in this Kingdom vast Numbers. Now among these persons there are particularly Quakers, ~~Wes~~leans, Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians, and some few Unitarians, but because the *latter* deny the Divinity of Christ, can it be right

right to represent the *Dissenters* as a body holding such an heretical tenet, as that Jesus Christ is a *mere creature*? But this you have had the hardiness to do. And here you will allow me again to quote your own words upon this subject, you say Page 11, the *Dissenters* of this day almost universally deny the Divinity of Christ. And in Page 83, you affirm; They will not allow Jesus to be more than Man; and as such, the obscure and illiterate son of an honest carpenter.*

Such, Sir, are your accusations and misrepresentation with respect to the *Dissenters* as a body. That

* With your usual inaccuracy you assert, Page 90, "That the Presbyterians in this part of the Kingdom are almost universally unitarians." I am credibly informed that the number of unitarians in the Congregation of Presbyterians, in the Town of Stourbridge, are but few. And if we may judge of the faith of the Presbyterian Congregation at Cradley, by that of their worthy Pastor, the *Rev. James Scott*, my much valued Neighbour; your assertion will not apply to that Society. It was with pain I observed in a late publication of your's, attempts made to run that Gentleman down; and I wish the present publication was free from that Spirit, but your attempts are vain; for his private conduct, and public character, are not to be hurt by such attacks.

there are those among the Dissenters who thus blaspheme, we have no doubt; (may heaven convince them of their sin!) but it is a dangerous thing to charge *whole* bodies with the crimes of individuals, as the following plain but innocent illustration will shew.

There are in your Church, I believe, Pastors and Teachers who do not always rigidly adhere to the rules of temperance; but shall we therefore say that *all* the Sons of the establishment are "Mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink, and continue at wine till it inflames them?" God forbid.

As you are a professed believer of the Doctrine of Christ's Divinity, it will not be expected that I should formally defend this article of the christian faith; But it may not be amiss here, to state the grounds upon which we believe this Doctrine.

Our belief of this doctrine then is not founded upon the dogmas of the papacy or the creed of

of ATHANASIUS, the articles of the Church of England, the writings of CALVIN, or the instructions of any fallible mortal; in this respect we call no man Master.

Fully satisfied with the evidences of the *plenary* inspiration of the Scriptures, we receive as undoubted, all its information; and judge ourselves bound implicitly to receive all doctrine therein taught: each of us saying, in this respect, as SAMUEL of old upon another occasion, " Speak Lord for thy " servant heareth."

From these unnerring sources of information we are convinced, the circumstances of fallen man are too wretched for a created arm to afford deliverance: Thus taught we also conclude that every creature is invariably bound to do its utmost in the service of its Creator, we can not therefore admit that merit could attach to the character of Jesus if he were merely a creature, though of the *very biggest order*.

It

It is therefore with gratitude we observe in sacred writ, so many infallible proofs of Jesus's true and proper GODHEAD. In the unerring Oracles we learn that Jesus, in the days of his flesh, received, and now from the heavenly world receives, that religious worship which it would be idolatry to offer to any creature. And notwithstanding we believe in the real manhood of the Son of God, and conceive of Him, in His official capacity as *mediator*, as the Father's Servant, yet, as touching His Godhead we doubt not but He is equal to the Father; finding as we conceive in the Volume of eternal truth, Almighty works,---Adorable Titles, Divine Perfections,---Eternal Existence, and absolute independence of being ascribed to Him.

But farther; in the Hymns and Psalms we most frequently use in our public worship, this article of our faith is frequently and explicitly set forth: for in the Calvinistical congregations, those celebrated compositions, DR. WATTS's Psalms and Hymns, are, I believe, generally used; and as that doctrine is so frequently expressed

in these compositions, if we did not approve of it, we should abridge them, and reject the obnoxious part, not being bound to use them by any Oath or Subscription*.

In

* Having touched upon the subject of Oaths and Subscriptions, as applied to ecclesiastical matters, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of here inserting part of a speech, of Sir George Saville, on the petition of the Clergy, for relief from subscribing the Articles of the Church of England.

" Some Gentlemen, says he, talk of raising barriers about the Church of God, and protecting His honour,—language that is astonishing; that is shocking; it almost approaches to blasphemy. What! a poor contemptible reptile talk of raising barriers about the Church of God? They might as well talk of protecting Omnipotence, and raising barriers about His Throne. Barriers about the Church of God, Sir? That Church, which, if there be any veracity in Scripture, shall continue for ever, and against which, the gates of Hell shall not prevail. If I may be allowed, on so serious an occasion, to recollect a Fable, it puts me in mind of one which I have met with, of a stately magnificent impregnable Castle, built upon a Rock, the basis of which was the center of the earth, the top of it pierced the clouds, the thickness of the walls could not be measured by cubits; at the bottom of it, a few Moles were one day very busy in raising up a little quantity of earth; which when some Mice saw,—What are you doing, say they to disturb the tranquility of the Lord of this Castle? We are not disturbing his tranquility, all blind as you are, you may see we are only throwing up a rampart to protect this Castle. The Church of God, Sir, will protect itself. Truth need not be afraid of obtaining the

In the Catechism we teach our Children, this doctrine is thus expressed, "The only Redeemer of God's elect, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be God and Man, in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever*.

I shall close this letter, Sir, with a quotation from a respectable and able writer of the present day, the Rev. Andrew Fuller of Kettering, in Northamptonshire; who is well informed respecting the present state of the religious world: His words are these: "Others have supposed that the main body of Dissenters had either imbibed the Socinian System, or were hastily approaching

the victory on a fair trial. The lovers of truth will love sincere enquirers after it, though they differ from them in religious sentiments. Those who are penetrated with the enlarged and benevolent spirit of the Gospel, will not condemn as heretics, will not reject as unworthy of affection, any who believe the Christian Religion, who search and endeavour to understand the Scripture, though they may be unable to comply with certain Creeds and Articles."

* See the Assembly's Catechism in answer to Question 21st.

towards it. Whether the suggestion of Dr. Horsley, "That the genuine Calvinists among our modern Dissenters are very few," has contributed to this opinion, or whatever be its origin, it is far from being just. Every one who knows the Dissenters, *knows* that the body of them are what is commonly called orthodox. Dr. Priestley who is well known to be sufficiently sanguine in estimating the numbers of his party, acknowledges with regard to the Dissenters, Unitarians are by far the minority. In Birmingham, where the proportion of their number to the rest of the Dissenters is greater than in any other Town in the Kingdom, it appears from Dr. Priestley's account of the matter, that those called Orthodox are nearly three to one: And throughout England and Wales, they have been supposed to be as two, if not three to one, to the Socinians and Arians inclusive". Thus far this worthy writer. I shall only add, if Mr. FOLEY thinks proper to contradict this testimony, let him first know, if requisite we can produce other

other witnesses, and far more circumstantial information; as in consequence of very false information having been conveyed through the medium of a popular publication, whereby many persons both at home and abroad, have been induced to think the major part of Dissenters in England, were verging to Unitarianism; several intelligent friends to truth have lately taken great pains, to ascertain the proportion which the Unitarian Dissenters bear to those of the Orthodox: and to these calculations we have free access.

I am,

REV. SIR,

Your's &c.

LETTER

THE FIFTH.

REV. SIR,

I Believe you will agree with me when I say, among the many evils that may result from improper conduct, the effects of sedition and treason are the most dreadful; as the page of history, and recent awful facts but too fully prove.

Indeed, whether the edifice of an established civil Government be attacked either by Sap or Storm, we may ever expect its overthrow will be attended with those dreadful consequences, that are sufficient

cient to affix the deepest criminality upon those, who have either immediately or remotely contributed to occasion such a Catastrophe.

I am very sorry to say, that in your late publication you have attempted to charge this awful guilt, not upon a few ill principled individuals, but upon all indiscriminately who have dissented from the established Church.

I do not mean however to affirm that you charged the Dissenters with having actually committed either Treason, or Sedition ; yet, notwithstanding a concession made in favor of the Separatists, after you have described the consequence that followed the fifth monarchy principles, in the reign of Charles the Second, you charge the Dissenters with being influenced by those principles, which never fail to lead to the commission of such atrocious Crimes.

For my part, I am of opinion this was your reason for placing them in such vile company. In

Pages 7, and 8, you have exerted your admirable descriptive powers, and have there exhibited what I think all must allow a striking portrait; but whether, with all its prominence of feature, it be just, and therefore fit for public view, remains to be determined.

In the back ground of this remarkable piece, you present to our view, a groupe of Figures calculated to alarm.---We will use your own words, "A set of Societies, say you, page 7, assembling together under specious titles, and upon plausible pretences; acting in open and avowed defiance to the laws and the constitution, and disseminating their poisonous doctrines with unremitting vigilance through every corner of the land. And when some of the ring-leaders have been brought to their trials, though the voice of their country have acquitted them of the actual crime of treason, and however their overt acts may have steered clear of the penalties of the Law, yet are their intentions sufficiently apparent."

In

In a more conspicuous part of this dismal picture, you have introduced, as I suppose, the ring-leaders and actors of the late dreadful transactions in France;----There representing England as engaged in opposition to the wanton and unprovoked attacks of the most ferocious, blood-thirsty, and unprincipled Banditti that ever ravaged the face of the Earth.

So much to delineate your inferior objects; but in the front of this gloomy and terrible assemblage, is presented a large body of Persons, viz. the Dissenters of this Kingdom: the former part of this singular paragraph contains this sentence, " In the mean while the Dissenters not only insinuate privately, but publish openly to the world, their objections. &c. " And lest your skill in associating different objects in one piece, should be lost, and your strong colouring prove of no avail, you thus close this remarkable passage; " And among all the numerous members of these so justly obnoxious societies, &c. I take upon me to assert, there cannot be found one single true, genuine

genuine, and sincere member of the Church of England. There is, there can be no fellowship between Christ and Belial."---So that, these bad Societies, these horrible Frenchmen, and these Dissenters, are collectively *Belial*---and the Church of England is Christ.

Ah! Sir, this may do with the undiscerning multitude; matter and language like this, may serve to make a country audience stare, and to inflame those wicked dispositions, that generate and keep alive, bigotry and persecution; but those who can distinguish, will view such declamation in another light: and notwithstanding your extensive learning, respectable situation, acknowledged influence, and well known abilities, will see, and upon proper occasion say, you have *artfully* joined together, what every well informed and honest man will ever keep asunder.

But, Sir, you do not only artfully paint, you also roundly affirm, Page 131, That "the Dissenters are *discontented men, impatient of Controul, and restless under authority.*"

Pardon

Pardon me, Sir, if I tell you, I have now shut your Book, fully determined to transcribe no more from it: For verily, Sir, my Spirit recoils, my heart is agitated; not with conscious guilt, either as to myself, the Congregation I have the honor to serve, or the main body of my Brethren the Dissenters; nor on the account of any one of that body; but at your hardness and audacity, and at the Consequences which may be expected to result, from what you have thus preached, and published, should the world believe you. Reflecting on the spirit of your publication, and your inflammatory language, I cannot but sensibly feel for the man, who, from the Sacred Desk, in the hearing it is highly probable, of the acting and respectable Magistracy of the Neighbourhood; and at a period when men might, and I must add, if so guilty, ought, to have been torn from every domestic sweet, and safely lodged in the gloomy Prison; there to have lain, till it had been expedient for law and justice to have had their course—*casteth fire-brands, arrows, and death*, instead of attempting to penetrate his audience, with the mild and affectionate spirit of christianity.

But

But, Sir, where is your authority for placing so many of his Majesty's good and faithful subjects with such vile associates? How will you demonstrate that the Dissenters are "Impatient of controul, and restless under authority;" Is it because, though excluded from the honors and emoluments of the State, they pay their part to support both Church and King? or, have the Dissenters, as Dissenters, for the last Century, acted in concert against the civil Government? Hath not the *very reverse* been the Case? Say, Sir, (for it is incumbent upon you to do it if you can) have the Dissenters, as Dissenters, formed political societies, or taken any step, either public or private, to impede the Wheels of Government? Do you know any thing that will prove the Dissenters, taken as a Body, either in the Country at large, in the Metropolis, or in your Neighbourhood in particular, have been "restless under authority"? If not, for the sake of christian charity, not to say common Honesty, call back immediately the heavy Charge.

If

If any individual, or individuals, among the Dissenters have swerved from the line of Duty, and evidenced a restless spirit under the civil Government of these Realms, we are sorry for it. Such conduct, evidenced by whom it may, is the object of our detestation: but on supposition that any among *us* have thus acted, are we, as a Body, any more guilty than that respectable class of Christians, the individuals that compose the Established Church, some of whose Members it is well known have, upon grounds of violent Suspicion, been brought to trial, and one of the *Ministers* of which community hath been found guilty of the horrid crime of Treason? But the fact is, the Members of the Established Church are happily innocent, considered as a body, and so are we; and therefore ought not to be the object, at which the shafts of malignant accusation should be levelled.

But to dismiss this disagreeable Subject, I proceed, Sir, to lay before you, what it is firmly believed are the views of by far the major part of the Dissenters, with respect to Civil Government.—

Civil

Civil Government then, Sir, we look upon, as to its origin, to be the ordinance of God.— As His good institution, adapted to the circumstances of human nature: but then, while we look upon Civil Government in its origin as the ordinance of God, we look upon its various forms to be the production of man, and therefore capable of improvement.— Thus, Sir, we admit the *Powers that be*, (the Governments that are established,) whether Monarchical,--Aristocratical,--Republican, or Mixed, are of God, and consequently not to be resisted, in their *legal* operations, with impunity.— It appears to us, that a *wish* to act in this manner is the vile and thoughtless offspring of a licentious heart; while we think with JUDGE BLACKSTONE, “No man, that considers a moment would wish to retain the absolute and uncontrouled power of doing what ever he pleases: the consequence of which is, that every other man would have the same power; and then there would be no security to individuals in any of the enjoyments of Life.” And further; it is an article of our political creed, that those who resist the *Powers that are*, without repentance and pardon

pardon, will receive at the Hands of the Righteous Governor of Heaven and Earth, as the Apostle says, Damnation.

But then, by the word *Power*, we do not understand the strongest Body exerting its influence in a capricious way; but force to be employed according to law, and ever used for the good of the subject.....For we cannot but think, with that great luminary of the Law, above-mentioned, that "Every wanton and causeless restraint of the will of the subject, whether practised by a monarch, a nobility, or a popular assembly, is a degree of Tyranny.....Nay, that even laws themselves, made with or without our consent, if they regulate and constrain our conduct in matters of indifference, without any end in view, are laws destructive of liberty.*

But since it is a principle with us, that civil Governments are *capable* of improvement, being in their modes the production of fallible man,
and

* Blackstone's comment. vol. 1 page 126.

and since the good of the subject at large, is the principle on which they are established, it appears to us it is a duty incumbent upon *all* to *seek* the improvement of that Government under which they live: And hence calm investigation, and sober remonstrance, either in the Legislative Body, or out of it, are not, we think, to be considered as Crimes.

Again; we cannot but think with the late Bishop Burnet, That if the liberty and property of the subject should be struck at by the Government, then resistance would become lawful. But then, before this could be the case, the Law must cease, and the British Constitution be destroyed; and hence, though we admit the former sentiment, we cannot but think with the great LAWYER above quoted, that, "No human laws will suppose a case which at once must destroy all law, and compel men to build afresh upon a new foundation; nor will they make provision for so desperate an event, as must render all legal provisions ineffectual. So long therefore as the English Constitution lasts, we may venture to affirm, that the power

of

of the parliament is absolute and without controul." *ad iudicium et vel sub iudice vel ad iudicium non iudicium habet nominis iudicis nisi est iudicis.*
But then, Sir, while we submit so implicitly to the uncontrollable power of parliament, we know upon what principle we do it.—We believe that parliament is in its own constitution designed for the good of the subject; and also, that it hath even made ample provision that the executive or Kingly power of these Realms should be conducted to *this* end. For we believe upon the Law authority aforesaid, that "The principal duty of the King is to govern according to Law. *Nec regibus infinita aut libera potestas*, was the constitution of our German Ancestors on the Continent. And this is not only consonant to the principles of nature, of liberty, of reason, and of society, but has been esteemed an express part of the common Law of England, even when prerogative was at the highest." The King saith, BRACON who wrote under Henry the 3d. ought not to be subject to man, but to God and to the laws; for the law

D.

maketh

* Blackstone's comment. vol. 1, page 162.

maketh the King. Let the King therefore render to the law what the law has invested in him, with regard to others: dominion, and power: for he is not truly King where will and pleasure rules, and not the law." The constitution of great Britain therefore, we most firmly believe is founded upon the broad basis of liberty; and till matter of fact convinces us to the contrary, we shall ever believe its administration is according to law. With such views, our reason tells us quietly, and gratefully to obey, for it is our *interest* so to do.

But finally. Nor does our reason merely prompt us to loyalty, our faith does the same thing;—by Faith we rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ, for the Eternal Salvation of our Souls;—but by the same Faith, we look to Him for a directory for the whole of our conduct whether personal, domestic, ecclesiastical, or political; And we hear him say as the Supreme Legislator of the Church " Render unto Cesar, the things that are Cesar's.—Let every soul

* Blackstone's comment. vol. 1. page 234.

soul be subject unto the higher Powers; Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the King as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them, that are sent by him. Honor all men—Love the Brotherhood—Fear God, Honor the King"—and *this is, and hath been* our conduct: for the truth of which assertion, we appeal to the Neighbourhood in which we live;—The Kingdom to which we belong;—and to the whole world.

Thus, Sir, it appears that the Orthodox Dissenters instead of being Schismatics, are justified in their separation from the Establishment both by the Laws of God and man.—Instead of being heretical in their creed, their faith is agreeable to the Truth as it is in Jesus.—And, instead of being restless under Authority, they are good and peaceable subjects; adhering to the civil constitution of England, from conviction, choice, and duty.

I have now, Sir, I believe given a true state of the Case; and shall finally close with saying, that, as I did

I did not put pen to paper, with any hostile intention, either with regard to Mr. FOLEY, or the Church of which he is a Minister; I hope, should he condescend to take any notice of this small performance, it will be with a view to disprove the assertions therein made, respecting matter of fact. Should Mr. FOLEY do this, as an inquirer after truth, I shall be much obliged to him, and will soon inform the public, of my conviction; but in no other case, do I at present, intend making any reply; but conclude, with subscribing myself,

REV. SIR,
17 NO 85
BRITISH
MUSEUM

Your very humble Servant,

THOMAS BEST.

COLLEY GATE,

CRADLEY.

AUGUST 26, 1795.

FINIS.